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SUBJECT: MIGRATION, DEVELOPMENT AND INTEGRATION: EU
GRAPPLES WITH POLICY OPTIONS

REF: BRUSSELS 0815

11. (U) At a two-day public hearing at the European Parliament, policymakers and experts exchanged ideas on harnessing international migration to help bolster European economies and populations. Their overarching call was for a legal and transparent immigration program, at the European level, which adequately ensured for the integration of newcomers. France outlined its success in reducing social tension caused by Islamic fundamentalists. Other themes included managing migration to help developing economies and to protect vulnerable people. Various representatives of new Member States called for the immediate free movement of workers within the EU. End Summary.

Overview

12. (U) On March 14-15, the European Parliament (EP) held a public hearing on migration policy which brought together a wide range of experts. In his opening remarks, Vice Chairman of the Development Committee Max van den Berg (Dutch Socialist) stressed that migration was "at the very heart of the interest of our countries and our citizens" and acknowledged the wide range of sentiments in Europe. Like many speakers after him, Van den Berg listed the positive aspects of migration (foremost, a supply of young, dynamic workers), as well as problems stemming from the half million migrants who enter Europe illegally each year (e.g., trafficking, violation of human rights and exploitation, etc.). He urged a European-wide policy to effectively manage migration and integrate newcomers.

13. (U) MEP Patrick Gaubert (French Conservative), Vice Chairman of the Civil Liberties Committee, spoke of political sensitivities and lamented that migrants were frequently portrayed negatively during European electoral campaigns. Also highlighting the need for an EU role, he said that migration policies made by one Member State frequently affected others. Moreover, Member States generally did not consider ramifications of their actions, whether it was granting an amnesty (i.e., Spain) or pulling the doors closed (i.e., Denmark, the Netherlands, UK, etc.). Gaubert characterized "zero immigration" as a "myth" and said that Europe needed managed, orderly immigration flows to sustain its population and economy.

14. (U) Speaking for the European Commission (EC), JHA Director Jean-Louis de Brouwer acknowledged Member State sensitivity in preserving national powers over immigration, noting that legal immigration was the only border management issue where Member States did not give the Parliament co-decision authority. He reported that after an in depth analysis, the EC concluded there is no proof that opening legal channels of immigration will reduce clandestine movements. Nonetheless, in January the EC launched a "massive consultation" in the form of a green paper to chart a way forward on legal immigration (reftel). De Brouwer said that integrating migrants is a primary EU concern and that later this year the EC will issue practical guidelines on integration.

15. (U) Luxembourg,s Director of Immigration Sylvain Wagner stated the presidency supported an EU approach to economic immigration. However, he said that because each Member State had a different labor dynamic the final decision should rest with national governments. (Note. Luxembourg has one of the highest percentages of foreign-born residents in the world. End note.) Wagner said transparent immigration rules could help reduce human suffering caused by clandestine travel and involuntary repatriations.

Migration and Development

16. (U) In his keynote address, Development Commissioner Louis Michel highlighted the positive aspects of migration, noting that it filled gaps in Europe,s employment market while reducing pressure on labor markets in the developing world. At the same time, Michel stated that development could help

stem outbound migration by attacking root causes such as poverty, conflict, human rights abuses and corrupt governments. He said that circular patterns of migration were ideal to best serve both the developing and developed worlds. Michel came out strongly against an idea endorsed during the Spanish Presidency to make development assistance conditional on cooperation by beneficiary governments in stemming illegal emigration or transit.

17. (U) Michel affirmed that development and security were complementary in nature, that development was the main instrument the EU had to eradicate terrorism in the long term.

18. (U) Stefano Manservigi, Director General of DG Development, outlined five points that a forthcoming EC communique would make regarding migration and development:

a) Remittances: The EC will consider ways to facilitate the flow of remittances (currently estimated to be twice the amount donors provide in official development aid). Among these would be proposals to lower transfer fees, to encourage private citizens to invest this money in development activities, and to extend access to bank accounts and credit with this money.

b) Diaspora: The EC will seek ways to better link expatriates with developing countries of origin. Proposals might include facilitating the transfer of knowledge and credentials, encouraging temporary movements through better visa policies, twinning cities, universities and companies, and providing training in languages of origin.

c) Brain Drain: Manservigi said that migration often deprives the developing world of its most talented citizens and cited the figure of 10,000 doctors and nurses who have left sub-Saharan Africa in order to work in rich countries. The EC will consider proposing an internationally binding code of conduct which would focus on preventing a brain drain from particularly vulnerable countries and/or sectors (such as health). To complement this measure, the EC might bolster wage levels in these countries by contributing to the salaries of health sector workers.

d) Regional Mobility: Manservigi noted that 80 percent of global migration is south-south in nature, including 20 million sub-Saharan Africans who live outside their countries of birth. He said that human resources could be better allocated by capitalizing on regional movements. According to Manservigi, one region that could benefit from such movements is the Caribbean, where the supply and demand of labor is skewed. He said the EC had allocated 25 million euros in 2005 to help developing countries better manage the south-south flows of migrants.

e) Circular Movements: Echoing his Commissioner's word, Manservigi outlined measures that would help migrants return home after temporary work in developed countries, such as pension mobility.

Migration and Integration

19. (U) MEP Alain Hutchinson (Belgian Socialist) endorsed a proactive EU approach to migration policy because the need for immigrants was unavoidable. "The future of our economy and our lives in the EU is at stake," he said, adding that the EU needed to better prepare Europeans for the inflows of migrants. Stressing the human rights dimension, Hutchinson urged the EU to combat xenophobia, racism and exploitation (including substandard labor and housing standards).

10. (U) France's chairwoman of the High Council for Integration, Blandine Kriegel, defended her government's approach to integrating foreigners from Muslim countries. She said that while the UK and the Netherlands responded to historic wars over religion by permitting freedom of conscience, France had adopted a strict neutrality of the state in matters of religion. Blandine stated that current government policies were an effective response to the growth of Islamic fundamentalism, which often jeopardized the status of women. She said that the law forbidding religious garb in schools had greatly reduced social tension in France. Currently, only 48 cases are unresolved, whereas previously there were thousands. She lauded other initiatives of the French state, including the establishment of the Commission on Secularity, the High Council for Integration, the Council of Muslim Faith (with its oversight in training imams) and a Museum on Immigration. Blandine noted that France is working with Morocco to revise its family code, which she said also sends a clear message to fundamentalists.

11. (U) MEP Claude Moraes (British Socialist) warned that the EU faced a social crisis because it lacked effective anti-discrimination measures. Referring to a recent

Financial Times article entitled "France is warned on atom bomb of forgotten minorities," Moraes said that many EU countries ignored anti-discrimination measures that were on the books. He called for a U.S.-style "green card" system to ensure transparency in managing immigration.

12. (U) MEP Maria Matsouka (Greek Socialist) said that the rise of right-wing parties and general discrimination against migrants within the EU could provoke social conflicts. She called for an information campaign to advocate a more social Europe and underscore the economic benefits of migration. However, Matsouka also cautioned about the harmful affects of migrants taking away jobs from older and unskilled Europeans.

13. (U) International Labor Organization (ILO) migration expert Patrick Taran said that low-skilled migrants who engaged in "dangerous, dirty and degrading" jobs generally had no problem finding work. However, these jobs often did not lead to superior opportunities for them or their children. ILO studies show that first- and second-generation immigrants showed net discrimination rates of 33 - 41 percent, even if their qualifications, educational attainment, skills and language abilities were on par with natives. Taran recommended a legislative approach to prevent discrimination and said that some studies indicated a need for civil anti-discrimination legislation to allow the reversal of the burden of proof.

Taran also urged EU governments to sign the UN Convention on the Rights of Migrant Workers, a suggestion that was endorsed by Peter von Bethlenfalvy of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and Luis Miguel Pariza of the EU,s Economic and Social Committee.

14. (U) Pariza noted that integration was a two-directional process which needed to take into consideration governmental policies and public opinion. He recommended giving newcomers better orientation and language training, ensuring non-discriminatory access to health services and education, purging school texts of xenophobic content, and considering the establishment of a European "citizenship" that would extend rights to all EU residents.

15. (U) According to Taran, Europe is currently reaping the results of poorly conceived migration policies of the 1960,s - 70,s which naively expected guest workers to go home. He said that the discrimination suffered by second-generation Turks and Albanians in Germany was particularly troubling. Given current demographic trends, Taran predicted that the social and cultural landscape in Europe in 30 - 50 years will be very different.

16. (U) A member of the UK Parliament warned that imposed multi-culturalism could backfire, nurturing resentment and hostility among native citizens. He advocated an immigration policy that placed immigrants in regions which needed workers. To illustrate, he said that while southeast England is overloaded with immigrants, other parts of the country can effectively incorporate newcomers without profoundly changing the cultural landscape.

Economic Benefits of Immigration

17. (U) According to IOM, effective migration management can contribute to "maintaining and increasing the overall economic growth, the functioning of the internal market and EU competitiveness." IOM said that it shared the EU,s interest in steering immigration flows towards legal channels while contributing to satisfying the economic and social needs of EU destination countries.

18. (U) Caritas Italiana expert Franco Pittau said that over one million immigrants had entered Italy last year and that migrants make the EU a more dynamic and prosperous place. He said that of the 600,000 domestic workers in Italy, about 500,000 were foreigners (and of this number 40% had degrees). He recommended raising Italy,s quota for immigrant workers, noting that there were twice as many applicants this year by employers than the existing 159,000 slots.

International Protection for Special Groups

19. (U) UNHCR,s Chief of Mission Judith Kumin acknowledged that asylum had a high political profile in the EU but lamented that it was generally cast in negative terms. She reminded states of their legal obligations and said that international protection was in danger of being eroded if asylum seekers were seen only as illegal immigrants. She lauded the ambitious Hague Program for its determination to create a single EU asylum system by 2012 and for its focus on the external dimensions of asylum. Kumin also urged the EU

to expand formal refugee resettlement programs, a concept endorsed by the EP. In closing, she praised the EU as "the key player in the international system" and said that the EU set a positive example for the rest of the world to follow.

120. (U) MEP Martine Roure (French Socialist) highlighted the problem of trafficking in women and complained that the EU is doing nothing "to free them from the grips of the mafia." She said that victims of trafficking were still being treated as criminals, despite EU measures put in place to protect them.

Eastern European Views

121. (U) Krisztina Berta, Hungarian Secretary of State, pointed out the responsibilities new Member States face in patrolling the EU's eastern border. She also noted the large number of ethnic Hungarians currently living outside EU borders, as well as the "huge impact on domestic policies" they exert. She took pride in Hungary's functioning asylum system, put into place before EU enlargement in response to the great flow of Balkan refugees during the 1990s. Berta said the Hungarian government was working to pass a comprehensive, single law to deal with asylum. She noted that while overall the number of asylum seekers has dropped (in line with global trends), the number of migrants has increased since EU accession. Because Hungary is facing a population decline, as well as the emigration of its own young professionals, Berta welcomed the EU debate on legal immigration.

122. (U) However, Berta noted the irony of talking about immigration from third countries when citizens of most new EU Member States are still not allowed to work freely in Western Europe. MEP Danute Budreikaite (Lithuanian Liberal) called for an end to the seven-year transitional period imposed on new Member States designed to protect western labor markets. MEP Toomas Savi (Estonian Liberal) also called for the free movement of laborers within the EU. He said Estonia's three migration policy priorities are: a) full Schengen membership by the fall of 2007; b) readmission agreements with Russia and China to stem the flow of undocumented migrants from the east; and, c) visa free travel for Estonians to third countries on a basis of reciprocity.

123. (U) A member of the Poland's national Parliament (who declared he had been an illegal immigrant in Europe 25 years ago) made a strong pitch for the EU to end its visa regime for Ukraine, Belarus and Balkan countries. He said that migrant laborers from those countries could help the EU secure its "Lisbon Strategy".

Comment

124. (U) Discussions about migration in the EU increasingly focus on the positive economic aspects. Certainly, this is a welcome development. However, failure to hear from die-hard skeptics (no far-right MEPs attended the EP hearing) or the growing immigrant community that does not wish to be integrated, undermines a true debate. The ILO expert's succinct analysis that "there is a high degree of ambivalence, if not schizophrenia" about migration in Europe is spot on. According to a study released by the EU's Monitoring Center on Racism and Xenophobia at the time of the EP hearing, over one quarter of the EU's population resists a multicultural society and a growing majority (about two thirds) believe that there are limits to multiculturalism.

125. (U) The June voluntary visitor program on integrating migrants and resettling refugees will afford European policymakers a close-up view of the U.S. model during this critical moment of debate in Europe.

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